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ABSTRACT

Presented is the report of a 1974 planning conference on raising public consciousness about the needs of the gifted and talented (GT). Noted are the following major conference purposes: to increase interorganizational awareness of activities to expand opportunities for GT individuals, to identify mechanisms for improving public awareness of GT needs, and to identify critical messages and constraints in communicating with key audiences. Cited are constraints (mistaken assumptions) which prevent commitment to and implementation of better programs and services for GT children (such as lack of public understanding that GT pupils need special differentiated help; that special services need not be costly; that programs can be provided within the educational mainstream; and that GT students exist among various racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups). Stressed is the need for advocacy and communication efforts to be targeted to key state and local decision makers (such as board of education members and legislators), parents, and regular classroom teachers. Recommendations for further action include development and distribution of a communication matrix (a sample matrix chart is provided) of GT advocacy organizations together with solicitation of input from key representatives outside the advocacy groups. The conference agenda and a list of participants are appended. (LH)

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RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS OF KEY PUBLICS ABOUT THE NEEDS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED

Report of a National Planning Conference
New York City - December 9, 1974

Sponsored by

National/State Leadership Training Institute
on the Gifted and the Talented

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Introduction

Raising the consciousness of key publics about the needs of gifted and talented has received growing attention by a relatively small group of advocates over the past ten years. The expansion of programs for gifted and talented, due largely to these advocacy efforts, has been significant. But much remains to be done. The fact that the great majority of gifted and talented children still do not receive special programs or services led the National/State Leadership Institute on the Gifted and the Talented to convene a planning conference at which several key national organizations would develop improved coordination of communications about the needs of gifted and talented.

This report describes the purposes and outcomes of that planning conference.

Background

The U. S. Office of Education Commissioner's Report to Congress (Education of the Gifted and Talented: Report to the Congress of the United States, 1971) recommended that national leadership training institutes be held ". . .to upgrade supervisory personnel and program planning for the gifted at the state level."

To meet this recommendation, the National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and the Talented was established in 1972 by the U. S. Office of Education through an Education Professions Development Act (EPDA) grant to the Office of Superintendent of Schools of Ventura County, California.

One of the chief objectives of this Institute has been "To increase public consciousness, awareness and knowledge about the gifted and the talented." It was this basic objective that led the Executive Director and Director of the National/State Leadership Training Institute to convene a December 9, 1974 conference of representatives of several key national organizations to seek advice and to develop initial plans for cooperation in communicating about the needs of the gifted and the talented.

Conference Purpose

The conference theme was "Raising Consciousness of Key Publics about the Needs of Gifted and Talented." Purposes of the conference were the following:

- To increase interorganizational awareness of activities related to gifted and talented
- To identify potential coordination mechanisms for raising public consciousness levels
- To identify the critical messages about the needs of the gifted and the talented which need to be communicated to key audiences
- To identify constraints in communicating about the needs of the gifted and the talented

Participating Organizations

Following is a list of the participating organizations.

Organization	Representative
American Association for the Gifted	Mrs. Marjorie Craig
National Association for Gifted Children	Dr. John Gowan
The Association for the Gifted, a division of the Council for Exceptional Children	Dr. Joseph Renzulli

Organization	Representative
National School Boards Association	Mrs. Shirley Hall
National Congress of Parents and Teachers Associations	Mrs. Erny Hilton
Robert Sterling Clark Foundation	Mr. Scott McVay
Education Commission of the States	Dr. Gene Hensley
Office of Gifted and Talented U. S. Office of Education	Dr. Hal Lyon, Ms. Jane Case Williams Mr. Mark Kreuger
Ventura County Schools	Dr. Robert Ponce
National/State Leadership Training Institute on the Gifted and the Talented	Dr. David Jackson Mr. Irving Sato Mr. James Miley Mr. Paul Richard
Pennsylvania State University	Dr. Joseph French

Conference Procedures

The morning session focused on brief presentations by each of the organizations represented at the conference. Opening the conference, LTI Executive Director David Jackson outlined the conference rationale: advocates of gifted and talented programs and services need to reach out to new, untapped publics rather than remaining in the same channels. Jackson emphasized that new advocates can be created within heretofore untapped groups. Expansion of the advocacy network is vital if expansion of opportunities for the gifted and the talented is to occur.

LTI Project Director Irving Sato outlined the training activities which have resulted in the development of State Plans and cooperative efforts with parents,

administrators and board members in expanding policy commitments and opportunities for the gifted and the talented. As Harold Lyon, Director of the OE Office of Gifted and Talented, commented: "The LTI has shown that a small amount of money can do a great amount of work in raising consciousness." Director Lyon discussed the history of the establishment of the USOE Office of Gifted and Talented and its current and projected priorities. Lyon emphasized that the role of the Office of Gifted and Talented is one of advocacy and stimulation of efforts in expanding opportunities for the gifted and the talented.

Marjorie Craig of the American Association for the Gifted, Joseph Renzulli, The Association for the Gifted, and John Gowan of the National Association for Gifted Children (in absentia and by letter) addressed "The Role of Professional Associations for the Gifted in Raising Consciousness Levels." Gene Hensley of the Education Commission of the States, Joseph French of Pennsylvania State University and Scott McVay of the Robert Sterling Clark Foundation discussed "Public and Private Policy Makers' Concerns and Constraints in Communicating Awareness of Needs of Gifted and Talented."

Mrs. Ernestine Hilton of the National Congress of Parents and Teachers focused on the "PTA's Role in Raising Consciousness Levels Regarding Gifted and Talented." The Texas delegate to the National School Boards Association, Shirley Hall, took a look at this organization and its relation to the interests of the gifted and the talented. Mrs. Hall emphasized the necessity for reaching school board members as key decision makers in improved opportunities for the gifted and the talented.

One major theme of the presentations was the desire of each organization to reach out to other organizations in a coordinated effort in communicating about the needs of the gifted and the talented. There was a feeling that advocates of programs for the gifted and the talented tend to communicate only among themselves, and thus miss critical audiences. Clearly, the desire to expand the number of advocates of programs for the gifted and the talented was a priority objective of those represented at the planning conference.

The afternoon session was then devoted to a working session in which participants identified the key publics to be reached, the critical messages about the gifted and the talented children which need to be sent, and the existing communication channels which can be utilized in such an effort. The remainder of this report will focus on the outcomes of this working session.

The Critical Messages: Countering the Mistaken Assumptions

Participants initially focused on the unique set of problems which they experience in convincing those outside the advocacy network of the need for programs and special services for the gifted and the talented.

Many of these communication problems rest with certain mistaken assumptions that many key decision makers make about the gifted and the talented children. A list of these assumptions which emerged from the work session follows:

1. Gifted and talented children can make it "on their own" without special differentiated help.

2. The gifted and the talented are already well served by the educational system.

3. Gifted and talented children are most usually found in white middle and upper classes. We have other more critical target groups to serve.

4. Special programs and services for the gifted and the talented will cost too much money and we'll have to rob from others to serve them.

5. Providing resources and special programs and services for the gifted and the talented children is elitist and counters democratic principles.

6. Gifted and talented children are those with "high I.Q.'s."

7. The federal government will provide broad scale support for programs for the gifted and the talented. We can therefore wait until this federal support comes.

It was the view of the conference participants that these mistaken assumptions form the targets for the types of messages which need to be communicated to key audiences and decision makers. Most participants agreed that these mistaken assumptions are the constraints which prevent commitment to and implementation of programs and services for the gifted and the talented children.

The following section details the types of messages which need to be communicated in order to correct these mistaken assumptions.

Mistaken Assumption	The Message to Counter the Assumption
1. Gifted and talented children can make it "on their own" without special differentiated help.	1. Special differentiated services for gifted and talented are critically needed. To assume that gifted and talented children "make it on their own" is as unfair as to assume that handicapped children "make it on

Mistaken Assumption	The Message to Counter the Assumption
	their own." Gifted and talented "can suffer psychological damage and permanent impairment of their abilities to function well which is equal to or greater than the similar deprivation suffered by other population(s) with special needs. . ." (Education of the Gifted and Talented: Report to the Congress of the U.S., 1971, p. 68) To deny special services and programs to gifted and talented is to deny equal educational opportunity.
2. The gifted and talented are already well served by the educational system.	2. Only four percent of the gifted and talented children receive adequate special educational programs or services related to their needs in 1971.
3. Gifted and talented children are most usually found in white middle and upper classes. We have other more critical target groups to serve.	3. Giftedness and talent exists among all races, ethnic and socio-economic groups and geographic regions. Special efforts need to be made to provide opportunities for gifted and talented in all of these areas.
4. Special programs and services for gifted and talented will cost too much money and we'll have to rob from others to serve them.	4. Creative instructional planning can result in inexpensive programs. Parents and community resources can be valuable and inexpensive allies in providing special programs and services. In addition, the investment of resources in programs for gifted and talented has potential benefits far beyond the investment. For it is among the gifted and talented that we can nurture the creative potential for dealing with and solving societal crises.

Mistaken Assumption	The Message to Counter the Assumption
5. Providing resources and special programs and services for gifted and talented children is elitist and counters democratic principles.	5. Programs and services for gifted and talented can and should be provided in the mainstream of educational programming, not only as a set of segregated activities identified for the "brighter student." Growing implementation of individualized instruction allows for special programming for gifted and talented without elitist overtones or implications. It is contrary to democratic principles to provide individualized services and activities for all students but the gifted and talented.
6. Gifted and talented children are those with "high I.Q.'s."	6. The definition of gifted and talented includes but is not limited to "those with high I.Q.'s". To restrict the definition in this fashion inhibits viewing the gifted and talented population from a broader perspective--that of a unique population with special abilities, interests and skills which reach beyond those strictly intellectual.
7. The federal government will probably provide broad scale support for programs for gifted and talented. We can therefore wait until this federal support comes.	7. The Congress has authorized the funding of special programs and projects for gifted and talented under the Special Projects portion of Public Law 93-380. However, this should be regarded as a stimulus and not a source of general support for programs for gifted and talented. Implementation and expansion of programs will come only through a commitment of state and local decision makers.

Key Publics

While expressing the need to improve communications among the organizations represented at the Conference, participants reached general agreement that the targets of their advocacy efforts generally were too limited and too often the messages were being communicated to those who already accepted the message. In short, advocates too often speak to advocates. Participants agreed that the following key publics were not being reached effectively:

- Members of state and local boards of education
- State and federal legislators
- School administrators
- School service personnel such as counselors and social workers
- Parents
- Classroom teachers "outside" the gifted movement

Difficulties in Reaching the Key Publics

Participants cited several major difficulties in reaching the key publics. Major difficulties centered on the mistaken assumptions about gifted and talented that large numbers of these key publics hold. The failure to target messages to these mistaken assumptions was identified as a major shortcoming of current communications about gifted and talented. Participants saw this as particularly critical in reaching key state and local decision makers. Second, the lack of resources available for reaching

these key publics was cited as a major, but not insurmountable, problem. Finally, as Dr. Joe French put it, "Since so many serve the gifted and so few are specifically designated to do so, lines of communication are difficult to maintain. . ." Compounding this problem was the common perception that face-to-face, one-to-one communication is the most effective technique. The small number of gifted advocates makes this type of communication with unreached audiences even more difficult. Therefore, the need to target carefully messages to specific audiences becomes paramount.

Using Existing Communications Channels to Create New Ones

The presentations in the morning session revealed a number of existing communications mechanisms which could be utilized to reach out to new audiences. Dr. Joe Renzulli of The Association for the Gifted suggested that a communication matrix be developed and distributed to each of the participating organizations as a first step in reaching a wider variety of audiences. Renzulli urged that the matrix identify the organization, contact persons, the type and frequency of communications devices and the audiences reached. A suggested format for this matrix with sample entries appears as Table 1 on the next page.

Organization	PRINT MEDIA					ACTIVITIES								
	Newsletter	Bulletin	Journal	Brochures	Others	Annual Conference	Training Sessions	Regional Conferences	Study Commission	Speakers Bureaus	Telephone Trees	Press Conferences	Press Releases	Others	Audiences Reached
American Association for Gifted Children Contact: Marjorie Craig 353 Ocean Boulevard Long Branch, N. J. 201: 870-1746				Guideposts (in preparation)	The Gifted Child (book in preparation) Membership Folder (in preparation) Library brochure (in preparation) Magazine articles (Top of the News, Nov. '71)	Fall of Each Year			Ad Hoc					Joint committees with other organizations; Correspondence; Conference on special topics	
The Association for the Gifted Contact: Dr. Joe Renzulli School of Education University of Connecticut Storrs, Conn. 06268	Talents and Gifts (quarterly)		Exceptional Children (monthly)	Membership brochures (distributed on request		April		Approximately three per year							
National Congress of Parents and Teachers Associations Contact: Mrs. Erny Hilton Route 3, Box 75 Cheney, Washington 208: 235-6410	Schools in Focus (Nov., Feb., April, Aug.)	National PTA Bulletin (monthly)		Commission brochures		June	Sponsored at board meetings	Five National Commissions					Distributed through national office		

Recommended Next Steps

1. Participants agreed that the conference revealed a number of communications devices and media of which they were unaware. It is recommended that the matrix format be completed by all organizations represented at the conference and be distributed by the LTI staff. Further, it is recommended that organizations representing key untapped publics and not represented at the planning conference be added to the matrix.

   Once this is completed a session should be held to select one of the critical messages identified in the initial conference. A group of organizational representatives should then come together to develop a specific design for sending this communication activity should then be formally evaluated.

2. Since it is assumed that the above activities would be carried out by advocates of the gifted and the talented, a second and concurrent activity to be considered would be to conduct an input session involving representatives of key audiences outside the advocacy groups. This session could be structured to test and validate and/or revise those critical messages identified in the New York planning session. In short, such a session would provide a "perception check."

The above two activities could be conducted concurrently and the data from the latter session could be used in designing the pilot "message sending" effort.

APPENDIX

Conference Agenda and Participants

NATIONAL PLANNING CONFERENCE
Sponsored by
National/State LTI On Gifted and Talented
Princeton Club, New York City
December 9, 1974

Theme: Raising Consciousness of Key Publics About the Needs of Gifted and Talented

9:30-9:45 a.m.	Introduction - Raising the Consciousness Level of Key Publics (Dave Jackson)
9:45-10:00 a.m.	The National/State LTI's Role in Raising Consciousness Levels (Irv Sato/David Jackson)
10:00-10:20 a.m.	The Federal Role in Raising Consciousness Levels (Hal Lyon)
10:20-11:00 a.m.	The Role of Professional Associations for the Gifted in Raising Consciousness Levels American Association for the Gifted (Marjorie Craig) The Association for the Gifted (Joe Renzulli)
11:00-11:45 a.m.	Public and Private Policy Makers Concerns & Constraints in Communicating Awareness of Needs of Gifted and Talented Education Commission of the States (Gene Hensley) Universities (Joseph French) Foundations (Scott McVay)
11:45-12:00 a.m.	Parent Teacher Organization's Role in Raising Consciousness Level Regarding Gifted and Talented (Mrs. Erny Hilton)
12:00-12:15 p.m.	National School Boards Association and the Interests of the Gifted and Talented (Mrs. Shirley Hall)
12:15-1:30 p.m.	LUNCH

1:30-5:00 p.m. Establishing Inter-Organization Linkages in Raising Consciousness Levels of Key Publics
(Tom Olson, facilitator)

1:30-3:00 p.m. a. Identifying Techniques for Reaching Key Publics - Who Are the Key Publics?

b. Identifying the Existing Communication Channels

3:00-3:15 p.m. BREAK

3:15-5:00 p.m. Next Steps in Inter-Organization Coordination for Increasing Awareness of Needs of Gifted and Talented - Brainstorming Session

NATIONAL PLANNING CONFERENCE
Princeton Club
December 9, 1974

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